

MEETING RECORD

NAME OF GROUP: Urban Design Committee

DATE, TIME AND

PLACE OF MEETING: Wednesday, May 7 2003, 3:00 p.m., Room 206, County-City Building, 2nd Floor, 555 South 10th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska

MEMBERS AND OTHERS

IN ATTENDANCE:

Members: Dennis Scheer, Gordon Scholz, Kim Todd (departed at 3:20 p.m.), JoAnne Kissel, Michael Eckert, Scott Sullivan (arrived at 3:11 p.m.), Third World Oforah

Others: Dallas McGee and Jeff Cole (Urban Development); Dick Rumbolz (interested citizen); Ed Zimmer and Michele Abendroth (Planning Department)

STATED PURPOSE

OF THE MEETING: Regular Meeting of the Urban Design Committee

Mr. Scheer called the meeting to order at 3:08 p.m.

Approval of meeting notes, April 2, 2003

Mr. Scholz moved to approve the minutes of the April 2, 2003 meeting minutes; Mr. Oforah seconded the motion with the following change from: "he hopes that both projects reflect the diversity of people who live in Lincoln", to "he hopes both projects reflect all Ethnic groups who live in the city of Lincoln, instead of just one group".

Motion for approval carried 6-0. Scheer, Scholz, Todd, Kissel, Eckert, and Oforah voting 'yes'. Sullivan absent for vote.

Discussion of urban design principles for Downtown Entertainment Center

Mr. McGee stated that he wanted to get the Committee's recommendation on certain design aspects for the Downtown Entertainment Center project. He stated that he had asked Mr. Sullivan to make a presentation for the Committee similar to the one made to the selection committee. Mr. McGee noted that one of the design features that probably will not change is the entrance, which will be on P Street. There will only be one entrance to the building for security and operation efficiency reasons. There will be an exit on O Street and on 11th, 12th, and in the alley. The challenges relate to how to design the various facades.

Mr. Sullivan began his presentation by stating that Lincoln is a walking city, and a well-designed facade is the welcoming force to the pedestrian. They want to reiterate the issue of the facade as the presence. Most notable is the lack of facade articulation. They feel there is a way to disguise the massiveness of the building. They want to break it down into increments that are interesting to look at. Windows are a big issue, but are difficult to deal with for a movie theater. The multitude of lighting examples was to reiterate the urban festivity. In regard to the details of the facade, they talked about artwork. They also talked about the alley access and considered sidewalk dining off the alley. Some of the streetscape artwork incorporates with 12th Street. If the budget allows, they want to look at some high tech possibilities with signage and imagery on the O Street side. They also talked about the notion of window

boxes; however, the current sign code does not allow advertising to occur off-site.

Mr. Sullivan reiterated the point that they are trying to break up the facade in to visually interesting increments, although David Livingston of Douglas Theatres has indicated that he wants it to look and feel like a theater. One of the issues is that David has indicated that he does not want to worry about maintenance, but they are going to try to persuade him to reconsider.

Ms. Kissel asked if there were implying that there was a revenue generating idea with the window boxes. Mr. Sullivan stated that they were using it as an interest to vendors, not necessarily to generate revenue.

Mr. Oforah asked if the building is a one or two story building. Mr. Sullivan stated that there is an upper level projection level. Mr. McGee stated that it is a one story, but from the outside it will look like a 2 or 3 story because of the stadium seating. Mr. Sullivan stated that you have to think of the building in 25 foot increments, rather than one continuous facade. He indicated that it could be articulated with in-and-out progressions, the roof line, and different levels. Mr. Eckert commented on the off-site signage and stated that he believes the ordinance is for signage, and not for advertising. He added that he feels that it would be a good opportunity. Mr. Zimmer noted that the existing understanding is that off-site signage is typically billboards.

Mr. McGee stated that they have asked Mr. Sullivan and David Erickson to start working with Michael Bott. One of the concerns that Mr. Bott has is that he proceed with that design and identify where the structural supports would be. In a month, the plans should be much farther along. At that time, they will know what they have flexibility with.

Mr. Sullivan stated that a source of debate is that the O Street facade drawings have always shown a pretty suggestive signage at the exit doors. He stated that he believes a source of frustration is that there needs to be a way to make it a visually interesting building without suggesting a point of entrance. He noted that there are other ways to treat that facade. Mr. Eckert stated that he agrees that it is almost dishonest to make people think there is an entrance there.

Mr. Scheer stated that it is almost unfair that decisions have been made regarding the materials and other things, and he feels that is one aspect that should be slowed down. He noted that there is over 100 years of continuum architecture in downtown, and this project type and the project itself has the opportunity to break that continuum, tradition, architecture and context. Mr. Scholz stated that he agrees and added that he feels that they should be considering other uses if the theater fails. Mr. Sullivan stated that they had a meeting with Mr. Bott and David Livingston and requested to slow down the project. Mr. Scheer offered an opinion in that instead of talking about the level of detail, they should be talking about how the other streets and buildings nearby affect this building. He stated that he feels the use is a good one, but if it fails in terms of architecture and urban form, then there is only limited success. One of the questions he has is if everyone is in agreement about what the "big idea" is. It has to include the integration of O Street into this project, and everything that Mr. Sullivan has presented. He asked how the Committee can help them in a constructive way. Mr. Sullivan stated that they had mapped the activities of the area, particularly restaurants. It was used to reinforce the importance of this block and how it can affect so many things around it. The commonality is that David Livingston has used the word "grand" to describe the theater.

Mr. Scheer questioned why it has to be one theater, and not a combination of four theaters. Mr. Sullivan stated that they have discussed each theater as a building. However, the more recent design turned the

opposite direction.

Mr. McGee stated that the role of this committee may help leverage some of those discussions. Mr. Scheer commented that the notion of “grand” is not an honest interpretation of what is happening in the building. Mr. McGee commented that the term “grand” can mean different things to different people. Mr. Oforah noted that if you incorporate some of the good qualities of downtown, you are going to have a “grand” building.

Mr. McGee asked if it was possible to put the discussion in a written format to give to him. Mr. Zimmer indicated that he could do that.

Ms. Kissel stated that a problem is that urban design issues do not always coincide with the business and operation side of things. Mr. McGee stated that those issues have been discussed, and there are certain things that cannot be changed. Mr. Sullivan noted that Mr. Bott and David Livingston could possibly be at the next meeting to take part in the discussion.

Mr. Scheer asked if a process has been established. He stated that he feels this needs exposure. Mr. McGee stated that there needs to be a public process so that others can have input. Mr. Sullivan stated that they had talked about the Embassy Suites process where they had a public informational meeting. Mr. Scholz asked if the owner is aware that is part of the program. Mr. McGee stated that the owner has indicated that the process is fine, but doesn’t want it to mess up their schedule. Mr. McGee stated that the agreement states that the City will contribute in excess of \$3 million to the project. The redevelopment agreement that was negotiated with Douglas Theaters states that the City will provide \$370,000 of additional work to the exterior of the building.

Ms. Kissel stated that she did not realize until now the magnitude of this project in terms of the future uses of the building. Mr. McGee noted that the Lincoln Theater was built 10 years ago and it is obsolete today. Mr. Scheer stated that he believes that the interior of this building will be retrofitted in a couple decades.

In terms of timeline, Mr. McGee stated that they want to open in May of next year, and if that is missed, then it will be in November. He noted that there are other aspects that are more in danger of setting the project back. One is the acquisition and relocation of the Stevenson’s property.

Mr. Scholz noted that this is a suburban solution brought to downtown; we can accept that, but the question is how to make it work. He also noted that it is similar to the Centrum. Mr. Zimmer commented that everyone could identify what was wrong with the Centrum, which was very useful. The retrofit achieved an interesting transformation, although it is still not very interesting, but not unsuccessful. He added that if we can make this work and it is not an urban insult, then we may have achieved what we want. Mr. Scheer stated that he agrees. He added that there has to be give and take in this process.

Mr. Sullivan stated that they meet with David Livingston and Mr. Bott next week, and asked if they could have a written document with the recommendations from this committee. Mr. Eckert asked if they are locked in to the floor plan. The reason he asked is because he feels everyone is concerned about the lack of windows. Mr. Sullivan stated that they have discussed several options with the floor plan, but have decided upon the current plan. That is the reason they are looking at the window boxes.

Mr. Zimmer made an observation in that the sooner the Committee’s thoughts are brought to the table, the

more likely it is that urban design issues could be incorporated in to the design.

Mr. Scheer commented that the dropoff is completely wrong in terms of marketplace and downtown urban areas. Mr. McGee stated that the sooner you can articulate what is wrong with the dropoff the better. Mr. Eckert stated that he feels that the dropoff is not needed because of the demographics of the people using the downtown theaters. Mr. McGee stated that they feel strongly about the dropoff, enough so that they are stepping back their building and giving up square footage. Mr. Oforah stated that he feels the dropoff is important. Mr. Scheer stated that he feels that you do not put a suburban business in downtown. He added that this is the type of thing that needs some give and take. Mr. Zimmer noted that this will also be a pick-up area, which is different than dropping off. Mr. Sullivan noted that this will also affect the streetscape. Mr. McGee stated that Public Works and the Police Department will support the dropoff because of safety and through traffic. Mr. Scheer stated that one of the components of marketplace is to connect this area with the Haymarket. He added that there should not be a conflict between car and pedestrian, which creates a safety hazard that is just as dangerous.

Mr. Eckert made a motion to adjourn at 4:54 p.m., seconded by Ms. Kissel.

Motion carried 6-0. Scheer, Scholz, Kissel, Eckert, Sullivan and Oforah voting 'yes'. Todd absent.